The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Medvedev Questions Power Vertical

By Alexandra Odynova

May 15, 2011



President Dmitry Medvedev made a series of statements Friday that could be construed as jabs at Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, although the phrasing was vague enough to pass for an ordinary pre-election speech.

The country should avoid concentrating too much power in the hands of a single person, future presidents will have to become aligned with a political party, and state officials should not hold office for too long, Medvedev said, naming tenets of Putin's power vertical at a meeting with young lawmakers in Kostroma.

All of these attributes also fit Putin, Medvedev's predecessor and political patron who remains the country's supreme power broker after 11 years and heads the ruling United Russia party without being a member.

"A person who thinks he can stay in power indefinitely is a danger to society," Medvedev said.

Putin kept silent on Medvedev's remarks over the weekend, and his newest political tool, the

All-Russia People's Front, pledged its support Friday for "the president" — but without naming him by name, thus allowing for the possibility of Putin returning to presidency in the upcoming March election.

"Excessive concentration of power is a dangerous thing," Medvedev said in response to a question from Grigory Fandeyev, a Karelia lawmaker with A Just Russia, according to a partial transcript of the visit on the Kremlin's web site.

Russian history shows that monopolizing power "leads to stagnation or civil war," which "must not be allowed," the president said.

But he also said a presidential republic is the only form of government fit for the country, even while conceding that the role of legislature and political parties must be increased.

To do this, the president should become a party member, something that has never before happened in the country's post-Soviet history, said Medvedev, who himself does not belong to any party.

But "this will happen when it happens," Medvedev said.

He said political heavyweights should not stay in office for years on end.

Any official, "from a village headman to the president, should think about who he can delegate his powers to," Medvedev said.

The political system in the country is evolving to accommodate change while abstaining from radical moves that could destroy it, he said. "You can't shake the system like a pear tree," he said. "It won't withstand it."

Friday's speech echoes Medvedev's earlier statements promising more competition in State Duma elections, which will be held in December. He also called the All-Russia People's Front a "political tool" last week, prompting speculation about a rift in his "ruling tandem" with Putin.

Analysts were divided on whether the Kostroma speech was another indication of a rift or a smokescreen to cover their pre-election plans. Putin and Medvedev have said one of them might run for the presidency in 2012.

"Medvedev is trying to demonstrate his independence with those cautious remarks," Alexei Makarkin, a political analyst with the Center for Political Technologies, said Sunday. "And it looks like the number of similar remarks will be growing soon."

But independent political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky said both members of the tandem were acting in accord.

"Like before, Putin and Medvedev tend to occupy different political niches," Belkovsky said. Both continue "to serve their common cause."

Meanwhile, United Russia released on Friday a manifest for the All-Russia People's Front, which is intended to unite all public groups under United Russia's aegis.

Members aim to “support the initiatives of our leader Putin and implement the policies of Russia’s president,” the manifest said.

The document never mentions Medvedev by name, but lists as its tasks several of his policy goals, including “a strong democracy” and modernization.

The emblem of the group, which was published last week by the pro-Kremlin youth movement Young Guard, depicts Putin’s stern face with the Russian flag as the background and invites Russians to “Plug In” to the group.

Medvedev is not included in the emblem.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/05/15/medvedev-questions-power-vertical-a6951